



Left to right, Dave Seivert handling, Scott Dewey, Barb Farell, Buster and Northrup Larson.



ASK THE PRO

training the trainer

By Scott Dewey

IN MY EXPERIENCE TRAINING DOGS, I have noticed that many trainers have benefited from broadening their perspective on a training plan. With that, I see that many trainers could benefit from having a clear idea of the big picture of what they are trying to accomplish as well as the discrete steps necessary to attain their ultimate goals. In this article, I hope to walk you through some of the key factors in a plan that will help you become a better trainer. It will be built in stages, and is designed to help the trainer realize where improvements can be made, as well as minimizing setbacks. I assume a general understanding of a training flow chart, and will include references to basic, transition, and advanced dogs. Several examples will be given in the different stages. These examples should be used for the trainer to ex-

pand on, even if they do not fit the dog you are training. The ultimate purpose of this article will be to focus on the little things, and the big picture will take care of itself.

Stage 1: Gauge Training Level with Potential

The trainer should try to remember that there is a difference between what a dog might be able to do (potential) and what a dog has been reliably taught to do (training level). A gauge needs to be determined in which the level of the dog's training is compared with the potential that you feel he has. The understanding of a dog's true potential can only be gained by the continued training and evaluation of each dog. This gauge needs to be constantly monitored as your dog's training advances, knowing that you can only

work the dog according to the lower of these two factors. Keep in mind, the lack of potential in a dog is ultimately what causes them to be washed out or not make it in competition. Yet more dogs have probably failed or were set back due to training over their level, when they showed a high potential. We all want to see a young dog with great potential try to do a test well above their level of training, but more often than not this becomes a detriment to their training.

It is okay to stretch a dog's limits on occasion to see what he is capable of doing, but do it too often, and bad habits will be created. For example, throw enough 200 yard marks for a six month old puppy that can really mark, and shortly they will quit marking the bird and start running at the gun.

For the most part these dogs want to do

the job; the trainer's objective should be to give them the tools to do it correctly. The potential or ability to learn will determine how quickly these tools can be taught. For example, handling problems with a basic's dog on the Double T must be resolved before the swim-by can be started. These problems can be categorized as a current weakness.

Stage 2: Make a Set of Goals, Based on Weaknesses

Once the dog's potential is gauged along with their training level, prepare an action plan with a list of discrete training goals which are intended to improve the weaknesses that have been identified.

Set an end goal for the dog, but make a training plan based on a set of short term goals. These short term goals should address the dog's current weaknesses.

For example, an advanced dog that has failed in competition to complete the last five land blinds due to auto-casting at critical positions needs a training plan to address that issue. A goal needs to be set to increase this dog's ability to have patience and control in all aspects of its life. Spend more one-on-one time with the dog in other aspects of everyday life where they must become good citizens.

Once the dog's weaknesses are isolated, a high percentage of them can be fixed or at least be advanced through communication and obedience. One will be surprised at the

level of communication that can be gained in this time period, and how it will help in the field. Of course, some yard drills still need to be implemented to accomplish the goals that have been set.

Stage 3: Yard Drill Work

Yard drills provide the trainer with a venue to work on specific weaknesses in a concentrated fashion.

Yard drills are designed to address the specific weaknesses that a dog has. They offer the trainer many benefits that cannot be gained in the field because of the opportunity the trainer has to teach the dog the desired behavior in a concentrated amount of time.

The wagon wheel lining drill (diagram 1) is a good example for a dog and handler that are having poor initial lines. This drill can be worked on at home where the ratio of initial lines greatly outweighs the amount of dog energy used, and all of the factors other than the weakness have been removed. Once this drill is mastered, it should be advanced into another drill. The trainer can do this by keeping the concept the same and changing the location. Next, start to incorporate the drill into more difficult initial lines on the orange piles (diagram 2). This individual training time with a dog is the base for the field work and competition events that the dog will participate in.

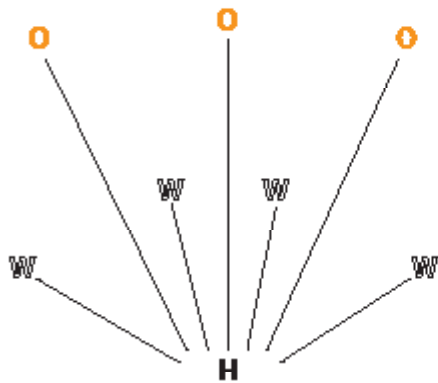
Stage 4: Field Work

Field work is the most complicated stage of the entire process. This stage combines all of the tools a dog has been taught, and challenges them with a variety of factors. This stage will also require the trainer to perform a balancing act between water vs. land, testing vs. teaching, training level vs. potential, blinds vs. marks, attrition vs. collar correction, recall vs. handling, help vs. correction, and too many more to mention. Each of these comparisons could justify its own article, but the point is to keep the field work as balanced as possible. Keep the weaknesses of each particular dog at the top of the goal sheet. For example, a dog with a weakness on short

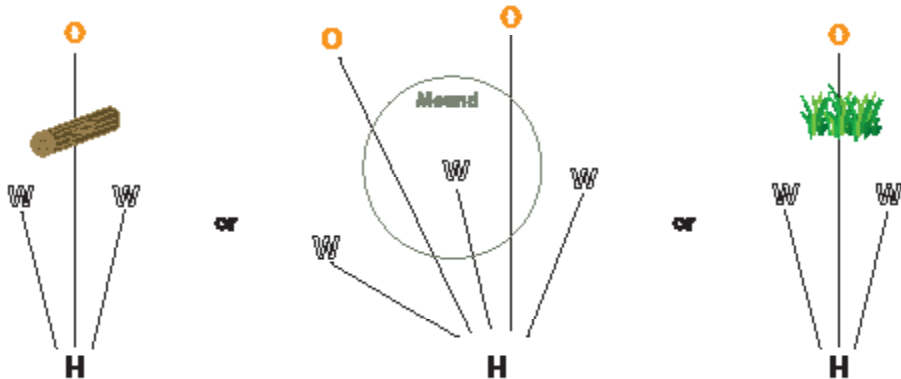
retired birds could be given a higher percentage of these marks to improve this fault.

This stage of the training also presents the trainer with a new set of difficulties. These include enough land and water to work the dog, help to throw birds, amount of time required, and coordinating schedules with others in the same position. This allows only a few options: the use of mechanical bird throwers, day train with a professional, or a training group of multiple dog owners. Using mechanical throwers will allow the trainer to specialize in exactly what is needed, but has its limitations on a true replication of the competition events that will be run later. This leaves the last two options which both include the training a group of dogs on one set-up, often where they are different ages, potentials, weaknesses, etc. This situation compounds itself with multiple trainers setting up a test, with no single game plan being the same. The same question, "how should my dog run this set-up" is always asked. Should the trainer throw all singles, do two doubles, repeat it until the dog is perfect, move up from the original line, or what? All of the above, look at the test, isolate the dog's weakness, stay within the training level of the dog, and break the test down to benefit the dog being trained. For example, take a dog that has trouble on short retired birds, yet rarely has trouble with punch birds (a bird longer than the rest). However, this test only has a retired punch bird. For this dog, send out an umbrella to retire a short station, and incorporate this bird into today's test. Do not fall into the trap of showing off your dog's strengths during a training session, stick with the game plan. For example, don't let your competitive nature take over in a training group. You can't let a dog that has poor line manners misbehave to see if they do the marks better than a buddy's dog. Another example would be letting your professional handle your dog in training because you are too nervous to run that day's setup. A trainer/owner, needs to work on all their weaknesses, along with their dog's. Save the weekends for showing off the dog's strengths. ■

#1 Wagon Wheel



#2 Incorporate harder lines to orange piles.



Rock River Retriever's Scott and Tara Dewey

Scott and Tara Dewey started Rock River Retriever's in July of 2000. After training primarily young dogs for the first five years, Scott moved into the all-age dogs over the past 5 years. In this time he has trained many dogs from force fetch to a FC and AFC, 15 national qualifiers, one national finalist, and this year's High Point Amateur dog. Last year the dogs at Rock River Retrievers combined for 19 all-age wins. Their kennel is based out of Waverly, IA, where with the help of Issac Langerud they continue to train basic through all-age dogs.